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Information on Creutzfeld Jacob Disease

What is Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease?

Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease (CJD) is a rare, fatal brain disorder that causes a rapid dementia and neuromuscular disturbances.

Symptoms of CJD
The duration of CJD from the start of symptoms to the inevitable death is usually one year. The initial stage of the disease can be subtle with ambiguous symptoms of insomnia, depression, confusion, and problems with memory, coordination and sight. As the disease advances, the patient experiences a rapidly, progressive dementia and in most cases, involuntary and irregular jerking movements known as myoclonus.

Problems with language, sight, muscular weakness, and coordination worsen. The patient may appear startled and become rigid. In the final stage of the disease, the patient loses all mental and physical functions.

The patient may lapse into a coma and usually dies from an infection like pneumonia precipitated by the bedridden, unconscious state.

CJD is a rare disease

CJD can affect anyone. The disease affects both men and women of all ethnic backgrounds, usually between the ages of 50 to 75 years. The disease occurs worldwide. About one person in a million gets CJD every year.

An abnormal protein called the prion causes CJD

The disease is due to an abnormal protein. We do not know why some people get this disease. They are not exposed to any one or anything that carries this abnormal protein.

There is an inherited form of disease

The most common form is the classical CJD which is very rare, that is described above but there is another form of this disease.

Approximately 10 to 15 percent of CJD cases are inherited. Genetic factors are thought to be responsible for some cases of CJD cases in some communities in Czechoslovakia and Chile,as well as among Libyan-born Jews.

CJD is not contagious except in very unusual ways

CJD cannot be transmitted by simple contact with the sick person, or contact with droplets, cough, secretions or nay object contaminated by the person.

The rare cases of CJD transmitted from one person to another were through:
- Graft of meninges (dura mater): the lining of the brain
- Medical instruments that were not properly sterilized and used for brain surgery.

There is no treatment or cure for CJD
At the present time, there is no known effective treatment or cure for CJD. The disease is inevitably fatal.

Others animals have similar diseases

Other animals have similar diseases, all caused by abnormal proteins. Sheep get scrapie, mink gets a spongiform encephalopathy, cattle get mas cow disease, elks and deer get wasting disease.

The connection between CJD and Mad Cow Disease

Mad cow disease was very common in England with hundreds thousands of cows infected. It seems that some people who had eaten food products from infected animals have become sick with a disease slightly different from the classical CJD. This disease is called new variant CJD.

Do not confuse classical CJD and new variant CJD

Until now, there is no evidence that the new variant CJD is found in the USA, in other words, no one living in the US has acquired mad cow disease.

When you hear in the media that some one has mad cow disease, the media talk about the classical CJD, the kind that is very rare (one per million person), the kind that is not acquired from eating animal products. The media often confuses classical CJD and nvCJD.